

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Dealing With Bad Decisions – 14-20 December 2019

Christ would have us learn to trust Him not to make bad decisions, and to look up to Him whence our strength comes. But sin, even corporate sin as Ezra experienced, brings shame and even despondency. Thus Ezra expressed the situation: “And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over *our* head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens” (Ezra 9:6).

Trust in the Lord. “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up” (Psalm 5:3). Thus wrote the psalmist David in the innocence and integrity of his soul. He could not have written thus if he had not been able to write as in verse 1: “Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my meditation.” Looking up is a sign of hope and courage, and of a clear conscience. The guilty child hangs its head, and the criminal is afraid to look the officer of law in the face. Thus Ezra, when identifying himself with his people, said: “I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head.” But the man whose heart is pure, whose thoughts are of God, and who meditates in his law day and night, can look up, not in self-confidence, but in the strength of Christ. “But thou, O Lord,” says David, “are a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head” (Psalm 3:3). He whose heart is free from guile may look up, and he shall behold the beauty of the Lord, for the pure in heart shall see God.

In dealing with, or rather avoiding, bad decisions, let us look up. The Lord does not want people to look down. If they do, like Bunyan’s man with the muck rack, they will see only the straws, the sticks, and the rubbish of earth, and not the crown that is above them. God is in Heaven; but that which is of the earth is earthy. By beholding we become changed. So then if we look down, we become grovelling in our disposition; if we look up, we may behold the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image. Here is an argument against despondency. The discouraged despondent man hangs his head. But when he does that he can see only himself, and so he adds to his despondency. Not only so, but by beholding only that which is imperfect, he becomes more and more assimilated to that which is imperfect. Satan makes an easy prey of the doubting, despondent man. How much better to say with the psalmist: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2). Besides this we are expressly enjoined to look up at this time. After speaking of the signs of His coming, Christ said: “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). Let us daily rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

In this week’s Lesson, we see the parallel of the bad decisions Israel made and the bad decisions our Seventh-day Adventist Church makes. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah it was mostly the leadership of the church – the priests and Levites – who were making bad decisions, entering alliances with the pagan world, mixing truth and error, and in turn leading the whole church into great apostasy. We are told: “These unlawful alliances caused great confusion; for some who entered into them were persons in high position, rulers of the people and men connected with the service of God, to whom, in the absence of Nehemiah, the people had a right to look for counsel and correct example. God had carefully excluded the heathen from uniting with his faithful worshipers; but the divinely erected barriers had been broken down, and as a consequence of mingling and intermarrying with other nations, the Israel of God were fast losing their peculiar, holy character” {SW July 5, 1904, par. 2}.

In those days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the leaders of the church gave an uncertain sound to the message God intended them to preach to the world, and church members copied the bad examples of the leaders. Today, our church leaders are repeating the same history of ancient Israel. There is nothing that can work so much injury to church or to any cause, as the inconsistency of its professed friends. Its enemies may circulate false reports, and misrepresent it, but these can injure only for a time; but when the professed friends of a church or a cause misrepresent it, no matter how zealous they may be, the result cannot fail to be damaging. Especially is this true with respect to Bible truths. A great responsibility rests upon those who take upon themselves the task of teaching the people. Earnestness and zeal are commendable, but care should be taken that the zeal be “according to

knowledge.” The apostle Paul, in seeking to impress upon the Corinthians the necessity of clearness in all their attempts to teach, said: “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” This was written with direct reference to those who spoke in an unknown tongue, which could not edify the hearers; but it may with equal propriety be applied to those who teach that which is manifestly inconsistent. In our church today, leaders and members live inconsistently with Bible truth in areas of health and dress.

“Seventh-day Adventists have been chosen by God as a peculiar people, separate from the world. By the great cleaver of truth He has cut them out from the quarry of the world, and brought them into connection with Himself. He has made them His representatives, and has called them to be ambassadors for Him in the last work of salvation. The greatest wealth of truth ever entrusted to mortals, the most solemn and fearful warnings ever sent by God to man, have been committed to them to be given to the world” {ChS 147.5}. Our identity is being eroded. If we are given this great truth to warn the world, by calling the other sheep into the flock, by calling them out of Babylon, what business do we have in embracing the errors taught in Babylon? Have we so long lost our peculiar identity that we see no errors?

Seventh-day Adventists are a “peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9, 10), yet we are fast losing our peculiarity with which the Lord would use us to save souls. But creeping policies led us to desire to be like the world, adopting world gospel methods, celebratory worship styles, like ancient Israel, “the divinely erected barriers had been broken down” leading to apostasy.

What is the underlying reason that we now are finding pagan influences creeping through many cracks in the wall and into the church? In the remarkable discourse concerning the signs of His second coming, our Saviour warned: “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4). This was given in answer to the question: “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” The underlying reason of pagan influences in our church lies in the following prophecy within Adventism that have been fulfilled: “The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless. Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure” {Ellen G White, 1SM 204.2}. Only to sweep away the structure remains to be fulfilled of this prophecy! Principles of truth have been discarded; our religion changed; books of new order written; a system of intellectual philosophy was introduced; and fundamental principles our pioneers believed have been accounted as error!

A shaking like in the days of Ezra is at hand. The unrepentant are “separated from the congregation” and thus ‘shaken out’ (Ezra 10:8). But many left the church. “Many who had married idolaters chose to go with them into exile; and, with those who had been expelled from the congregation, they joined the Samaritans, a heathen people who had combined with their idolatrous worship many of the customs of the Jews. Hither some who had occupied high positions in the work of God now found their way, and after a time they cast in their lot fully with them” {SW July 5, 1904, par. 8}. And so it is today, “The time is not far distant, when the test will come to every soul. ... In this time, the gold will be separated from the dross in the church. True godliness will be clearly distinguished from the appearance and tinsel of it. Many a star that we have admired for its brilliancy, will then go out in darkness. Chaff like a cloud will be borne away on the wind, even from places where we see only floors of rich wheat. All who assume the ornaments of the sanctuary, but are not clothed with Christ’s righteousness, will appear in the shame of their own nakedness” {5T 81.1}.